

DOCUMENT FILE

NOTE

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FROM Italy (Phillips) DATED Nov. 3, 1937

TO NAME 1-1127 GPO
(Enclosing report of October 8, 1937 from Mr. Jay Walker, Cairo.)

REGARDING: Naval affairs - Libya.

Comments upon number of Italian naval vessels used in patrolling the thousand mile coast line of Libya since the summer of 1935.

Information concerning the natural harbor at Tobruch which has space and water depth for anchorage of as large a fleet as Italy may care to station at that point.

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Naval.

There has been an increasing number of Italian naval
vessels used in patrolling the thousand mile coast line
of

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of Libya since the summer of 1935. These units include submarines, torpedo boats, and small cruisers. Tobruch, Bengasi, and Tripoli are used as bases. One of the first points occupied by the Italian expeditionary forces in 1911 was Tobruch. It was realized at that time that the natural harbor in the Gulf of Tobruch offered a potential naval base. Development of the Tobruch base on any important scale was delayed until the beginning of the Mediterranean tension in 1935. The two most serious obstacles in establishing a naval base at Tobruch have been the absence of drinking water, now carried from Derna -- a distance of about a hundred miles -- and the fact that the surrounding country is almost entirely a rocky and sandy surface of dreary waste lands. The nearest important oasis inland is at Giarabub, more than 175 miles to the south, while Derna is the closest point to the west. Eastward, the road leads to the desert lands along the Egyptian border.

The natural harbor at Tobruch runs inland nearly two miles and is from three-quarters to a half mile wide along its full length. The entrance to the harbor faces east, with a stretch of land about four miles wide on the north, separating the harbor on that side from the open sea. On both the north and south shores and around the western end of the harbor, hills rise abruptly from the water's edge to a height of about 300 feet. These hills afford a natural protection, and vessels anchored there may not be seen from the sea except through the eastern entrance. During my visit to Tobruch in March 1936, only a few vessels of from six to eight thousand tons

... and two light cruisers were anchored in the roadstead at the extreme western or inland end of the harbor. Six submarines and five sea planes were anchored near the docks on the north side. It may reasonably be assumed that there is space and water depth at Tobruch for the anchorage of as large a fleet as Italy may care to station at that point.

The water depth at Porta Bardia -- close to the Egyptian frontier -- is known to be too shallow for the use of any but the smallest sailing vessels until such time as extensive dredging operations are carried out.

The harbors at Derna and Apollonia are also shallow and offer no natural protection for naval purposes. Troops landed at Derna during 1936, had to be disembarked about a mile from shore and landed from barges and launches.

The harbors at Benghazi and Tripoli have been constructed by the Italians since the occupation in 1911. Long concrete breakwaters have been built at both ports to protect the harbors from the open sea. Ships must pass through comparatively small entrances which are continuously being dredged. The absence of hills near both harbors leaves no natural protection for naval vessels.

The harbors at Sirte and Misurata on the Gulf of Sirte, and also Luara near the Tunisian frontier, are so shallow that even small steam vessels must anchor in the open sea.

The information was given, during 1936 and the early

part of 1937, that the Fascist authorities were attempting to make the residents of the colony "naval minded". It was noted that a fair portion of the Fascist Militia were being trained as naval reserve corps, and many units in the youthful "Ballila" and "Avangardisti" were also receiving their training for sea life. This change in instruction was considered a part of the Fascist campaign for greater naval strength.

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